

The Family: An Engaging Classroom and A Domestic Church

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract

The family is the basic unit of society, and the experiences children have in their families influence their development. Professionals in the field of child development and leaders in the Catholic Church agree that parents are a child's first teacher, and the home is a child's first classroom. Children are beginning school with different levels of readiness. To address this concern, professional organizations have been created to help parents create a stimulating learning environment at home. The effects of faith education outside of the home is limited if the formation is not accompanied by regular instruction by parents. Many documents were published by the Catholic Church to encourage parents to understand the role of the home as the domestic church. The corresponding significance of the home environment as a classroom and a church requires parents to actively engage in regular activities with their children. Parent involvement is the hallmark of healthy children, families, classrooms, and communities.

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Project Rationale

As a child development major, I have learned about the impact of families on a child's development. Throughout my four years at Ball State University, I have taken a variety of courses that explore the affects of the home environment on the child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Parents have a tremendous responsibility to provide for the needs of their children. No family is perfect, I recognize; however, parents who make small efforts to invest in the lives of their children will see positive results.

Throughout college, I have been an active member at St. Francis of Assisi Newman Center and Parish. At St. Francis, students have the opportunity to interact with and meet families from the community. Families who are involved in church and incorporate their faith into their home life raise children who are more likely to maintain their faith for a lifetime. Getting to know a variety of families at St. Francis allowed me to see the different levels of catechesis each family was passing on to their children.

Integrating my classroom experience and my experiences at St. Francis, I began to research the importance of families in education and in the Catholic Church. One does not have to look too far to find a wellspring of information about parent involvement in both areas. I saw this as an opportunity to combine my academic knowledge base with my religious education. Both groups, academia and the Catholic Church, encourage parents to take on an active role in the lives of their children.

This project consists of an oral presentation I made to parents at St. Francis of Assisi. In this presentation, I challenged and encouraged parents to fulfill their role as their child's first and most important teachers. I also synthesized my knowledge and research to write a research paper that parallels the message from academia and the Catholic Church. This project is not a complete picture of the many facets that influence a child's development. This project does not analyze the affect of different family structures. However, this paper does show that parents have an irreplaceable role to play in the lives of their children.

The Family: An Engaging Classroom and A Domestic Church

Experts in the field of child development and leaders of the Catholic Church agree that families have a valuable role to play in the lives of children today. Extensive research exists on the topic of family involvement in education and catechesis. Understanding the parallel between scholarly research and church documents provides insight into the influence of the family environment. Child development theorists and professionals in the field recognize the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers. Leaders in the Catholic Church also recognize the role of parents as their child's first evangelizers, sharing the gospel through their daily lives. Parent's involvement will influence a child's academic and spiritual formation. Comparing these two systems and understanding their overlapping message opens the door to deeper understanding of the way in which children develop and are influenced by their environment.

A family is defined as a group of individuals living under one roof, of common ancestry, and united by certain convictions; a family is the basic unit of society (Merriam Webster, 2011). A family may consist of biological family members or a group of people who love and support one another. The definition of a family is continually changing and evolving as society changes. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the words family and parents interchangeably. While the Catholic Church's ideal is that children be raised in a two-parent family, modern reality is that there are many different family structures in which children are being raised today. Issues of family structure are only peripherally relevant to this paper.

From the Field of Child Development

Understanding how children develop is a complex process. Professionals in the field of child development have many resources available to help them understand how children learn

and grow. Developmental theorists have studied a variety of aspects related to child development in an attempt to shed light on the complex nature of how young children develop. This section of the paper will explore the role of parents in their children's education. With this information, the reader will then consider the importance of the environment in which children grow and develop, including the role of the parent. Additionally, in response to this information and to the needs of the community, the reader will be presented with a variety of organizations that promote the positive growth and development of all children.

Understanding Child Development

Understanding the role of family in a child's development begins with understanding the role of the adult in a child's education. Children are for the most part passive learners in their environment up until the age when they can take control of their experiences. During the time when children rely solely on adults for stimulation, entertainment, and formation, parents have a unique responsibility. If parents understand their ability to create or eliminate learning opportunities, they will become more aware of how their actions shape the educational formation of their children.

Developmental and Learning Theories. Each of the developmental theorists can be studied in great detail; however, for the purpose of this paper the theories will be examined in light of the role of the adult in shaping the child's development. Theories are ideas designed to explain, describe, or predict what happens and what will happen when children grow and learn (Charlesworth, 2008). Theories are prevalent in all areas of study where individuals seek to understand or explain a process or product. When studying children, theorists take different approaches to explaining the process of child development. These approaches include the following: behaviorist, normative or maturational, and constructivist. Behaviorist theories

emphasize learning that occurs as a result of the child interacting with their environment. A child may learn to speak by listening to adults and imitating their sounds. Normative or maturational theorists emphasize certain ages that children should gain skills such as sitting, crawling, and walking. Constructivist theories state that children construct or create their own knowledge through interactions with their environment. Each theory and theorist has strengths and limitations; therefore, singling out one theory to explain all of child development will result in deficits in learning and understanding. When studying the role of the parent or adult in the child's development, the theories of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, B.F. Skinner, and Alfred Bandura can be used. The reader is encouraged to research each of the theorists to understand how they can be used individually to explain specific aspects of child development.

Despite their differences, each of the theories recognizes the role of the adult in the child's development. Surprisingly, these roles vary only slightly. Piaget and Vygotsky describe the role of the adult as a guide; the adult sets the stage for learning (Charlesworth, 2008). Freud, Erikson, Rogers, and Maslow also explain the role of the adult as a guide. Skinner's view emphasizes the control the adult has to serve as a director to manage the child's behavior. Bandura's theory encourages the adult to model appropriate behavior. Each of the theorists recognizes to some extent the position that adults and parents have in shaping the development of children. Adults serve as guides, directors, and models. This oversimplified explanation of each of the theories demonstrates the necessity of adult-child interaction. Adults impact the way a child develops by the way they choose to respond to the child, the questions they ask the child, and the learning opportunities and experiences they make available for the child. Professionals

and parents need an understanding of their role and must work together to build relationships that nurture open communication and dialogue:

The adult who works with young children needs to understand the development of the child from the time of conception. With this knowledge, adults can gauge where children are in their development. When speaking with parents, the adult can also ask questions that will provide information on critical background factors that have influenced the child's development prior to the time the child come under the adult's care. This information can be used to evaluate and interpret the child's current behavior.

(Charlesworth, 2008, p. 170)

Recognizing the variety of experiences children have at home, prior to attending school, teachers will become more aware of the diverse needs of the students.

Environment. Children are influenced by the adult interaction in their lives, as well as the overall environment in which they develop. The home environment affects the child's health and well-being. Clean water, healthy and nutritious foods, and loving and nurturing relationships are necessary for children to feel safe and build healthy attachments to their caregivers. Many professionals recognize the importance of the home environment:

It should be clear that policymakers and others who want better educations for our children should also want to strengthen U.S. family structure, because the former is at least partly dependent on the latter... It is vital to support the conditions in which the greatest numbers of children can grow up to be educated and socially competent. (Center for Marriage and Families, 2005)

The importance of the home environment is most clearly evident in situations where the child is physically at risk. Children need safe drinking water, proper sanitation, clean air, sufficient food,

proper housing, and waste disposal. Threats to a child's health include "Germs, worms, and disease-bearing insects...Poverty, conflicts, natural and man-made disasters, and social inequity further enlarge the seriousness of these threats to children's health" (Charlsworth, 2008, p. 177). Prior to meeting the educational needs of children, these basic needs must be provided. Children need to have their basic needs met consistently for healthy development.

Families constantly face challenges, and as a result, children face psychological risks. Some families are able to cope with the stressful situations, while others fall victim to a variety of stressors. Stress has always been a part of family life in some form or another. "Children today face many of the same stressors of growing up that children a generation ago faced: separation anxiety, sibling rivalry, school, peer pressure, and dependence versus independence" (Berns, 2004, p. 113). Even if a child's immediate family or immediate environment is supportive and nurturing, children also experience stress from events in the greater community such as global terrorism or natural disasters.

Assuming that the child is in a safe and loving environment, the parent takes on the responsibility to make the environment stimulating and inviting to the child. Supporting children in each area of development – cognitive, social, emotional, and physical – requires time and effort on behalf of the parents. Research has shown that parents' efforts can be effective:

On the basis of the present findings, it is suggested that parents be informed (e.g., through parent education) that children's exposure to cognitively stimulating learning opportunities through direct experiences, materials, and the atmosphere of the home can facilitate their academic intrinsic motivation. (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1998)

The parents set the tone in the home beyond their direct interactions with the child. The parents' relationship will also influence the child. Parents who work as a unit, who encourage and

support each other, will provide a stronger support system for their child. The child needs support from his or her parents individually, but also as a whole. Children need support from a variety of sources; these sources are most helpful when they are connected in an intentional and systematic way (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008).

Responses to Research and Community Needs

In response to the need for parent education to promote active parent involvement, several organizations have responded by focusing their mission on connecting children, parents, communities, and classrooms. Professionals and educators must empower parents to assume an active role in the education of their children. As more research continues to reveal the influence of the home environment on a child's school readiness and overall development, more organizations will initiate strategies for making the home an engaging classroom. Three organizations that currently emphasize the role of parents and the comprehensive nature of a child's education are Parents as Teachers, Head Start, and the Harvard Family Research Project. Each will be discussed in the following section.

Parents as Teachers. Parents have an important role to play in the life of their son or daughter. An organization in Missouri has responded to the need to empower parents in their important role as their child's first teachers. Parents as Teachers began as a response to the recognition that children were beginning school with different levels of readiness (Parents as Teachers, 2010). Educators created the concept for Parents as Teachers in the 1970s, and they received funding from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and The Danforth Foundation. Parents as Teachers officially began in 1981. The state of Missouri recognized the benefits of the program, and the Missouri legislature provided state funding in 1985. This funding allowed Parents as Teachers programs to be implemented in all Missouri

School districts. Since its inception, Parents as Teachers has expanded to all fifty states. The mission of Parents as Teachers is “To provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life,” and their vision is that “All children will learn, grow and develop to realize their full potential” (Parents as Teachers, 2010). Parents as Teachers utilizes a home visiting model and connects families to the most respected organizations and professionals who can serve the needs of their individual family. Parents as Teachers works collaboratively with other organizations and professionals, including Head Start. In their position statement on Head Start, Parents as Teachers states:

The philosophy of Parents as Teachers, like Head Start, revolves around the idea that parents are children’s first and best teachers. Although both programs emphasize parent involvement as the foundation of their programs, Head Start specifically serves high-risk families with incomes at or below the federal poverty line. (Parents as Teachers, 2010)

As more and more professional organizations begin to recognize the important role of parents, the network of support for parents will increase.

Head Start. Prior to the creation of Parents as Teachers, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the War on Poverty in 1964. Head Start was part of the War on Poverty (Illinois Head Start Association, 2011). The Office of Economic Opportunity created Project Head Start in 1965. Initially, Head Start was an eight-week summer program, but Head Start has experienced tremendous growth since its creation. Head Start was created to help break the cycle of poverty, or the perpetuation of poverty from parents to children. Head Start now includes full day and year long services. “Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational,

health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families” (Office of Head Start, 2010). Head Start provides opportunities for children to prepare for school, but even more importantly, Head Start fosters positive family involvement:

Head Start was initially conceptualized as a program for children and their families. Head Start’s parent involvement component has always been an important part of the program’s operations...Family partnerships must also involve parents in their children’s development and education, enhance their parenting skills and provide opportunities to participate in the program as volunteers or employees. (Duch, 2005)

Family involvement is a definite strength of the program. Positive parent-teacher relationships are beneficial for the children. “They engage parents in their children’s learning and help them in making progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals” (Family and Social Services Administration, 2011). The holistic approach of Head Start equips all members of the family with resources to meet their needs.

Harvard Family Research Project. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) provides an outlet for professional research related to children, families, and their communities. HFRP completes its own research, evaluates projects, and synthesizes the work of others. They strive to provide practical information that will stimulate improvement in policy, practice, and evaluation (HFRP, 2011). HFRP focuses its research on the belief that:

Educators, policymakers, and families increasingly agree: Schools cannot do it alone. Children need multiple opportunities to learn and grow—at home, in school, and in the community. Complementary learning is a comprehensive strategy for addressing all of these needs and ensuring success for all children and youth. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach—which intentionally integrates both school and

nonschool supports—can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. (HFRP, 2011)

HFRP focuses on early care and education, out-of-school time, and family and community involvement in education. Through their work, HFRP creates a research publication, conducts research and analyzes key issues, develops and supports collaboration, and tests and refines evaluations approaches. Four key components of the HFRP are *The Evaluation Exchange*, Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE), Out of School Time Research and Evaluation Database and Bibliography, and Storybook Corner (HFRP, 2011). *The Evaluation Exchange* is published quarterly and presents new lessons on emerging strategies for evaluating programs and policies focused on children, families, and communities. FINE is a national network of people who promote strong partnerships between schools, families, and education. Membership is free, and members receive access to the most recent information. The Database and Bibliography provides information about the evaluation of Out of School programs and provides a comprehensive list of all evaluations. Storybook Corner is a place for educators and families to promote awareness, discussion, and practice of family involvement. HFRP is a comprehensive and accessible resource for parents, teachers, and professionals. Educators can utilize the articles for their own personal educational growth, and educators can make the information available to parents. Professional research supporting the need for comprehensive learning strategies is a vital tool for raising awareness, encouraging change, and provides incentive to take action to strengthen the overall environment in which children develop.

The home is a child's first classroom. Parents serve as the guide or director and set the stage for their child's future learning. Before parents can create a stimulating environment that fosters learning, they must be able to provide for the basic needs of their children physically,

emotionally, and socially. Assuming the basic needs of the children are met, parents should work to provide positive learning experiences in their home. Organizations rooted in academic research have arisen to help parents in their efforts. Parents as Teachers and Head Start work with parents to provide them with the necessary resources to create a safe home learning environment. The Harvard Family Research Project works to organize and present information about the comprehensive nature of a child's education. Parents may hear about the importance of the home environment from these or other similar organizations, or parents may learn about their role from the teachings of the Catholic Church. The next section will explore Church documents related to education, family, and the home.

From the Catholic Church

A child's education is a joint effort between parents and teachers. This cooperative effort is true not only for academic learning but also for faith formation. In an article from *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, the author emphasizes the lack of parent involvement in their children's religious education programs, "Religious education programs often operate in isolation from the home, not as an extension of the home" (Bunge, 2008). Parents have a powerful role in the faith formation of their children, but many churches fail to emphasize their important role. Parents must be encouraged to engage in their child's faith formation:

It is imperative that they include parents and primary care-givers in their programs, and emphasize that faith formation is a cooperative effort between home and congregation. They must continue to find ways to engage and support parents so that faith formation is part of everyday life and practice. Supporting parents is also important because the family has the most potential of any institution for providing for children's basic needs and for shaping their spiritual and moral lives. (Bunge, 2008, p. 350)

Parents are the most influential in shaping their child's development, whether positively or negatively. Just as professionals in the field of child development have responded by creating programs and outreach tools to engage parents, so have individuals and groups within the Church. The Catholic Church has published information in a variety of sources about the necessity of parent involvement and the overall importance of family. This section of the paper will examine three main Church documents related to the family and the role of parents in their children's education. The reader should consider the parallel messages between the Church and professional organizations. Although their messages differ slightly, both sides are ultimately working toward the same goal of increased parent involvement in the lives of their children.

Church Documents and Teachings

During a formative period in the Catholic Church's recent history, leaders in the Church included the topic of the family in their discussion of the future of the Church in the modern world. Throughout the documents of the Second Vatican Council, members of the council discuss the purpose of education and the importance of parent's involvement in secular and religious education.

Second Vatican Council. In 1962, Pope John XXIII convened an ecumenical council, the Second Vatican Council, which is commonly referred to as Vatican II (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2008). The council continued to meet under Pope Paul VI in 1965. Ecumenical is defined as representing the whole body of churches, promoting worldwide Christian unity or cooperation (Merriam Webster, 2011). The purpose of the council was to inspire a spiritual renewal of the church and a reconsideration of the position of the church in the modern world. Among other topics, the council addressed the importance of education. Pope Paul VI proclaimed the Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, on October 28,

1965. This declaration emphasizes the importance of education for all individuals. Exploring these writings demonstrates the Church's emphasis on education in all its varied forms. The Church does not restrict, limit, or mandate the means of educating children; however, no matter what the means are, the Church calls for equal educational opportunities for all.

Pope Paul VI begins by explaining, "The Sacred Ecumenical Council [Vatican II] has considered with care how extremely important education is in the life of man and how its influence ever grows in the social progress of this age" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965). All aspects of education are studied and examined in the document. The Church is concerned with all of man's formation, and the Church recognizes its role in the progress and development of education. Pope Paul VI discusses in the first section the meaning of the universal right to an education. He states that all men have the right to an education, and true education strives for the formation of the human person. Specifically discussing Christian Education, Pope Paul VI says that Christians, by right of their Baptism, have a right to Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965). In later sections he describes the Church's concern for those who teach about the faith, teachers, catechists, and clergy, those who serve the Church directly. Pope Paul VI considers the importance of schools, because schools form students' ability to judge rightly, pass on information from previous generations, foster a sense of values, and prepare students for their professional life. Pope Paul VI recognizes the significance of teachers and educators:

Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and adapt. (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965)

Pope Paul VI discusses the Church's role in serving those who attend non-Catholic schools and the need for the students to be formed in their faith, as well as their secular studies. Catholic schools are examined and discussed. Catholic schools have a crucial role in fostering a dialogue between the Church and society. Children receive special preparation in Catholic schools, and teachers have an important role to model the life of Christ. The declaration discusses different types of Catholic schools, including colleges and universities. The ecumenical council recognizes the central role of education in the formation of all human-beings and the variety of ways individuals can be formed.

The council does not ignore parent's obligation as the authors of education. The Church believes that a truly Christian family is vital for the life and progress of the Church. Parents cannot ignore their duty to educate their children:

Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking...Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965)

Families need the help of the whole community and the Church. To support parents in their efforts, the Church supports the rights of parents. Pope Paul VI writes that parents must have the liberty to choose a school for their child. The state must ensure that quality education, and thus formation, is available to all: "Therefore the state must protect the right of children to an adequate school education, check on the ability of teachers and the excellence of their training, look after the health of the pupils and in general, promote the whole school project" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965). The Church encourages parents to work together to assist the

schools. The Church urges parents to become involved with their child's school, as well as to integrate catechesis, or oral instruction, into their daily lives.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. After the Second Vatican Council, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was created. The idea was a recommendation by the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985. Pope John Paul II appointed a Commission of Cardinals and Bishops to develop a compellation of Catholic doctrine (USCCB, 2011). Bishops all over the world reviewed the text and thousands of amendments were made. "On June 25, 1992 Pope John Paul II officially approved the definitive version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*" (USCCB, 2011). The Catechism is a valuable resource for priests, bishops, and the laity, or members of the Church. The Catechism references the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Catechism is essentially a summary of the Catholic faith and is valuable for teachers. The Catechism specifically addresses the important role of the family. The family is referred to as the "domestic church," the "original cell of social life," and a "privileged community" (CCC 2204 - 2207).

The Second Vatican Council refers to the family as the *ecclesia domestica*, or the domestic church (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964). The family serves as the first school of Christian life and a school for human enrichment (*Gaudium et spes*, 1965). Just as parents are their children's first teachers, the Church reminds parents that they provide the first example of the Catholic faith to their children. The home provides a natural environment for learning because children spend a significant amount of their first years at home. The family has a specific role within the greater family of the Church – to educate and form children to become active members of the Church. Each family, in their own unique way, is a miniature model of the Church. Because the Church

chose to include the family in their official documents, the Church shows that it recognizes the importance of the family. The Catechism further states:

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues...Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. (CCC 2223 – 2226)

The experiences children have, whether positive or negative, in their families are indicative of their connection to the greater community as a whole. Families teach a powerful moral lesson to their children that no other institution can teach. Families are the only institution based primarily on love; families teach connectedness and commitment to others (Bogenschneider, 2006). In families, children learn how to love, how to respond to authority, and how to view the world. Especially young children, who are dependent on their parents for their physical and emotional needs, will develop their view of the world based on how consistently their needs are met. Children's educational experiences and faith formation are determined or significantly influenced by their family.

Familiaris Consortio. Pope John Paul II desired to provide families with even further insight into their role and responsibility within the Church. On December 15, 1981, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the role of the Christian family in his apostolic exhortation, called *Familiaris Consortio*. Pope John Paul II discusses a wide variety of aspects of family life, including the challenges facing families, the importance of strong marriages, and the responsibility of the

Church to protect the family. An apostolic exhortation is a letter written by the Pope to the Church encouraging its members to take action (Second Exodus, 2010). This exhortation is a response to the meeting of the Synod of Bishops who met to discuss the family. After the Second Vatican Council, Synods of Bishops or councils of the Church including the Pope, met regularly, every two to three years. Bishops from each country would meet in a Synod, along with the Pope, to study an important topic of church life. After the Synod, the Pope typically published an Apostolic Exhortation, which explains the insights and knowledge learned from the council (Our Sunday Visitor, 1997). *Familiaris Consortio* includes similar points from the Second Vatican Council documents and provides a holistic perspective on the family.

The message of *Familiaris Consortio* can be broken down into the four important tasks of the family: to form a community of persons, to serve life, to participate in the development of society, and to share in the life and mission of the church (Meyers, 1993). The main goal of the family is to love and share that love. The foundation of this love is between the husband and wife; their relationship forms the foundation of the family. Pope John Paul II discusses the challenges facing marriages today, including the increasing prevalence of divorce. Forming a community of persons begins with developing and fostering loving relationships. Serving life, the second task of the family, is achieved by educating and raising children. Participating in the development of society includes parents passing on their Christian values to their children; families are the “first and irreplaceable school of social life” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981). Finally, families are called to share in the life and mission of the church. The mission of the Church is to evangelize and spread the gospel message. Parents must share in this work of not only bringing the gospel to their children, but also sharing this message with the world. Pope

John Paul II encourages families to “become what you are” or strive to reach their full potential (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981).

The information from *Familiaris Consortio* is made more accessible to parents in an article written by Dr. David Michael Thomas. In his article, “Pope John Paul’s Advice for Families,” Dr. Thomas shares seven of what John Paul II defines as classic truths about the family. The family is the foundation for life. Parents provide an example of God’s love for their children; parents make God real to the child (Thomas, 2003). Dr. Thomas emphasizes that John Paul II recognizes the importance of the early years and the lasting affects they can have on children. Parents are their children’s first evangelizers, and they share the gospel message through their daily words and actions. John Paul II emphasizes the importance of family life; he says, “the family has as its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1981). The family is the foundation of Christian life. The two key relationships are the relationship between the husband and wife and the parent-child relationship. Dr. Thomas provides encouragement in response to the Second Vatican Council’s declaration of the family as the domestic church, “It may be messy, terribly unstructured, noisy and disorganized, but it’s still Church” (Thomas, 2003). Family life may be chaotic, but everything that happens in the family is important. John Paul II challenges parents in their role as their children’s first teachers. The most important catechetical experiences occur in the home; “the home is where basic Christian ministry happens, where the Word of God is first and continually proclaimed and where one can recognize and experience God’s great love” (Thomas, 2003). The future of the Church and of society as a whole begins with the family. The family is instrumental in forming the future, Dr. Thomas explains. These high expectations for families are difficult to fulfill, but as John Paul

II's writings and other Church documents demonstrate, the Church is concerned with the work that families do and how they serve the Church and the rest of society.

The majority of religious education programs operate in isolation without the support of the home environment. To strengthen and solidify the messages taught in Sunday school, faith formation must be a cooperative effort. Parents must incorporate their religious beliefs and spirituality into their everyday lives. Learning that occurs in school is strengthened by activities outside of the classroom, such as homework assignments. Building a foundation of faith education is rooted in the daily habits and practices that occur at home in the family. The Second Vatican Council proclaimed a *Declaration on Christian Education*. This declaration discusses the right for all individuals to gain an education and includes all aspects of education. The declaration states that parents have an obligation to educate their children and must be recognized as their primary teachers. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the family as the domestic church, the original cell of social life, and the first school of Christian life. Children's experience in their families transfers to their experiences in society as a whole. Finally, John Paul II emphasizes the many and important roles of the family. Specifically, the family forms a community of persons, serves life, participates in the development of society, and shares in the life and mission of the Church.

Unified Mission

Professionals in the field of child development and leaders in the Catholic Church agree that the family has an irreplaceable role to play in the overall development and well-being of children. While both groups emphasize different aspects of a child's development, their goal is ultimately the same: to provide nurturing, loving, and supportive environments that allow children to develop to their full potential socially, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. The

changing American family influences the formation children receive within their family. The Church and educators must work together to promote the strengthening of all families. As further research is completed about the connection between family life and the classroom, this information can be used to create new programs within schools, churches, and community that equip parents with the tools necessary to properly fulfill their role as their children's first and most important teachers.

Making Connections

To fully understand the important role of families, one must consider all of the factors and influences in a child's life. While the family is a child's first classroom, multiple forces affect the child's ability to grow and reach his or her full potential. Theorists provide helpful ways to understand the interconnectedness of the environments in which a child develops. Examining each of these environments provides a more complete picture. The ecological systems theory depicts the interconnectedness of each environment in relation to the child. A model of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory can be found in Appendix A at the conclusion of this paper.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Among the theories depicting the many influences on a child's development, Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is most relevant and applicable. Bronfenbrenner stresses the importance of viewing children in all their roles, in all areas of their environment (Charlesworth, 2008). Bronfenbrenner was one of the first psychologists to utilize a holistic perspective on human development. He emphasized the importance of the social environments in which children are raised and recognized the connection between the breakdown of the family and the increasing rebellion and violence among youth (New World Encyclopedia, 2011). The ecological systems theory includes four

systems in which a child's relationships and interactions take place – the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Berns, 2004). This model places the child or the individual in the middle surrounded by the different systems in which he or she interacts. The amount of direct contact the child has with the systems is unique, based on the child's specific circumstances. The goal of the systems theory model is to show the interconnectedness of the environments and their affect on the child's development.

The first system is the microsystem, which includes a child's relationship to home, school, neighborhood, peer group, and church (Charlesworth, 2008). The child has the most direct and frequent contact with the people, places, and things in this system. The next system, the mesosystem, consists of the interactions between the child's microsystems – the interactions and relationships between the child's home, school, neighborhood, peer group, and church. Moving further away from the child, the exosystem includes settings in which children are not active participants but affect their microsystems (Berns, 2004). Examples of exosystems include the government, parents' workplace, and mass media. The child's development is also influenced by the attitudes and ideologies of the culture. The macrosystem includes religion, culture and ethnicity, economics, political ideology, and science and technology. These overarching factors shape the child's overall environment. Each environment is shaped by the events and transitions over the course of life, also known as the time period or the chronosystem (New World Encyclopedia, 2011). Throughout the course of history, changes occur in all aspects of life including technology, politics, education, and family life. When studying and analyzing the factors that direct a child's development, each of these systems or levels must be included. Understanding every experience or environment that affects the child's development is

nearly impossible, but taking a closer look at the relationships in the child's life will reveal valuable information.

The Ecological Systems Theory is a holistic perspective on child development. The goal of the theory is to show the interconnectedness of the environments in which children reside. The model unifies the role of the family as classroom and church. Each of the environments in the child's life interacts and shapes the child's development. Bronfenbrenner's work calls for active involvement by parents, teachers, and church leaders. The family, school, and church are located in the child's microsystem, the place where the child spends the majority of his or her time. The interrelationship between these systems is the child's mesosystem. Strengthening these relationships will enhance the child's development by creating consistency and continuity.

Conclusion

The experiences children have in their family sets the stage for their future development and integration into society as a whole. Parent's involvement in their child's life affects their academic and spiritual formation. Professionals in the field of child development and leaders in the Catholic Church recognize the role of the family as the child's first classroom and church. The experiences children have in their homes will positively or negatively shape their academic experiences and faith formation. Theorists describe the role of the parent as a guide or director; parents set the stage for future learning. Organizations have arisen to help parents. These organizations present research and practical application on the role of parents as their children's first teachers. Connecting the child's classroom experience with the home environment will strengthen their learning. Similarly, faith formation cannot operate in isolation, although it frequently does. Faith formation must be a cooperative effort. Learning is strengthened by activities outside the classroom, such as homework. Faith formation is strengthened by daily

habits and practices. The Catholic Church teaches that parents have an obligation to educate their children, and parents are their children's primary teachers. The family is a domestic church and the first classroom of Christian life. The family shares in the mission and life of the Church and all of society. The family is the basic unit of society. Children spend the majority of their early years in a family setting. While all the environments in their lives influence children, they have the most frequent and direct contact with their family. Studying child development from a holistic perspective and analyzing the interconnectedness of the environments begins with a study of the family. The family is at the core of child development.

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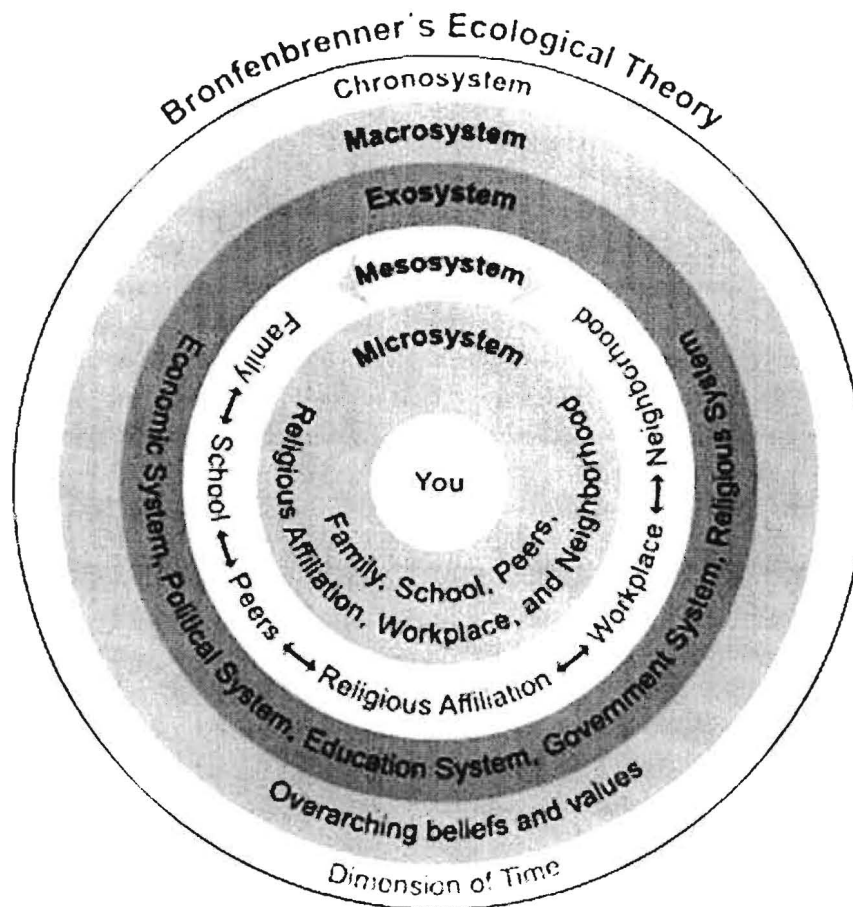
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Appendix A



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The following is a brief reflection I wrote after completing the presentation at St. Francis of Assisi on Sunday, February 20, 2011. The reflection includes a discussion of the process of planning, researching, and presenting.

Stacey Winterrowd

Parent Presentation Reflection

February 23, 2011

Phase 1: Research

As a child development major, I am interested in the ways in which young children develop and grow. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which religion shapes the development of young children. My original focus for research was to understand how parents could utilize children's literature to educate their children about their faith. This topic led me to research how children develop their faith or spirituality in a more general sense. As I began to complete research, my focus shifted slightly as I began to find information that overlapped with the material I learned in classes at Ball State. I found resources published by the prominent members of the Catholic Church about the important role of families, especially parents, on the development of children. In my classes, we frequently discuss the importance of the early years, positive parent-child relationships, and healthy marriages. Through further research, I found that the Church also emphasizes these positive relationships and experiences. This new research led me to shift my focus from ways in which parents can educate their children to educating parents about the necessity of building positive relationships with and educating their children.

I began my research by looking for information about effective ways for parents to read to their children. I am passionate about children's literature, and I believe that parents and children benefit from the time parents spend reading to their children. I see this as an opportunity also, for parents to educate their children about the Catholic faith. Many concepts in the Catholic faith are complicated and complex. Children's books simplify the concepts in a way that helps parents explain their faith to their children. I looked for research supporting the

importance of parents reading aloud to their children. I was successful in finding information about reading in general, but there is limited information about connecting reading and faith formation. Many scholarly sources emphasize parents investing time in reading with their children, as well as modeling a love for reading to their children. As I continued to research this facet of faith formation, I began to search for research on the broader topic of faith formation. I became interested in how children come to understand their faith.

When I began searching for research on this topic, I was met with more success. I found a variety of articles focused specifically on this topic. It was clear that other researchers have sought to understand how children develop in relation to their religion or spirituality. I read an article titled *Toddler Spiritual Formation and the Faith Community* from the International Journal of Children's Spirituality. In this article the author explores the connection between the way in which individuals develop autonomy, or a sense of self, and the relationship to their spiritual formation. The author writes, "Our nurturing task is to find ways of linking the big picture of [the church's] redemptive history with the immediate experiences of the child's daily life. Our hope is that the child will—over time—affirm that this is *my* story about *me*, and it is *our* story about *us*." This research led me to discover an apostolic exhortation, or a letter, by Pope John Paul II.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II wrote to the clergy and the faithful of the whole Catholic Church on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. This exhortation addresses a wide variety of topics related to the family and specifically the education of children in the family. Pope John Paul II reiterates the Church's teaching on the dignity of marriage. He highlights the positive aspects of the modern family, as well as addresses the challenges facing families in today's society. He discusses God's plan for

marriage and family in the eyes of the Church. He also discusses the role of the family in educating children and raising them in the Church. *Familiaris Consortio* is a lengthy document full of valuable information; however, some of the information is hard to digest or to understand without a background in theology. This led me to search for commentaries and summaries of the exhortation. I found several valuable articles that highlighted the key points of the letter and made the information more accessible to parents.

Finally, this research led me to seek out resources available for parents. The Catholic Church teaches that the role of the parents in educating their children is irreplaceable. I was interested in finding out if there are any tools available to help parents educate their children. This brought me full circle to where I began my research. Parents can use resources at their local libraries, bookstores, and church libraries. I began to research Catholic bookstores in the area, as well as explore the children's books at the library at St. Francis of Assisi, here in Muncie, Indiana. Also, I began to scour the Internet looking for valuable websites, blogs, and catalogs for Catholic educational materials. By completing simply Google searches and asking around for websites that parents utilize, I quickly developed a lengthy list of sources. This showed me that other parents are interested in ways to share their faith with their children and ways to uphold the duty that the Church calls them to fulfill.

Phase 2: Presentation Preparation

After I gathered a sufficient amount of information from a variety of sources, I began to piece together a comprehensive presentation for parents at St. Francis of Assisi. This portion of the project proved to be challenging in many ways. I had an over abundance of information, and I struggled to choose the most valuable and relevant information. Scheduling a time and place for the presentation was also challenging. I created a survey and asked parents about their

interest in a program and their availability. Most parents were available during the time of Sunday school. I planned to present information to parents while their children were already occupied, and the parents were waiting around the church. I also faced challenges while publicizing for the presentation and spreading the word to parents. I sent out information in the most efficient way possible, but not the most personal.

My first challenge involved narrowing down the information I collected and choosing the most vital information to share with parents. I integrated information I learned in a presentations class at Ball State. In this class we discussed the importance of giving parents information that they can directly apply to their life. While I valued the theology behind Pope John Paul II's letter, I knew I needed to provide parents with ways to implement changes in their daily life. As I sifted through the information, I realized that the best format for the presentation was to present a manageable amount of information and dedicate time to intentional discussion among the parents. Parents are a valuable resource for one another, and I wanted to tap into the hands on experience of the parents.

I also faced challenges in scheduling a time and place for the presentation. Parents who responded to the survey I created did not demonstrate a significant preference for one specific day or time. I decided to utilize the time during Sunday school when the children are in the classrooms and the parents are waiting; I hoped to draw parents in this way. Choosing this time was beneficial for some parents; however, several parents were unable to attend because they teach Sunday school. During the time of Sunday school, almost every single room in the parish office and in the church is being used as a classroom. This presented challenges in choosing a location for the presentation. I chose to have the presentation in an empty office on the second floor of the St. Francis Newman Center or parish office. To prepare the room I had to move the

furniture around to make room for chairs. However, these logistical challenges were manageable.

I also experienced challenges while publicizing for the presentation. Often parents ignore the announcements in the church bulletin and do not pay attention to the announcements after Mass. Throughout my experiences and involvement at the Newman Center, I have learned that the most effective publicity tool is word of mouth. As a student, I do not frequently come in contact with parents at St. Francis. I relied on the relationships I have with a few parents, and I asked them to encourage others to come. The most effective way to reach a large number of families is through Sunday school. I created a flyer and sent it home with all of the children who attend Sunday school. Through these methods of publicity I hoped to draw in a small group of parents who were eager to learn about their role as parents.

Phase 3: Presentation

After narrowing down the research and finalizing the details for the presentation, I was finally ready to present the information to parents. Prior to the actual presentation, I spent time with my mentor, a parent at St. Francis, reviewing and practicing for the presentation. My mentor provided valuable support throughout the entire process, especially during these final stages of presenting.

The day before the presentation was full of preparations such as making copies of handouts and practicing my speech. I prepared handouts for the parents that included a long list of resources with websites and local bookstores. I also printed and copied an article that served as the foundation or the meat of my presentation. Instead of encouraging parents to go look up the article online, giving them a hard copy increased the chances of them spending time reading the information. I also created an evaluation form to assess how well I met the parent's

expectations. After these preparations were finished, I spent time reviewing the outline of the presentation.

Spending time practicing my presentation was incredibly helpful. When making any type of presentation, the presenter must practice before hand; you do not want the first time you say the information to be up on stage. Reading through my presentation outline was similar to proof reading a paper. This allowed me to catch any mistakes or awkward transitions. This preparation also allowed me to feel more prepared and in control. I also prepared the room by setting up chairs and laying out the handouts the night before.

On the morning of the presentation, I made sure to allow enough time get ready. I was unsure of the number of parents who would attend. I was satisfied and excited that ten parents took advantage of this educational opportunity. Two married couples attended, and the rest of the parents attended without their husband or wife. The presentation had a late start, which shortened the time available. The presentation was sandwiched between two Masses or services on Sunday morning. Even with the limited time, I was able to present the information and allowed time for fifteen minutes of discussion at the end. The parents were willing to discuss the challenges and joys they have experienced while trying to pass on their faith to their children. Some parents offered more examples and stories than others, but I know that the parents all benefited from listening to the other parents.

Overall, the experience of presenting to the parents was positive. I was concerned about the parents responding in a positive way to the information, but they each found a point that related to their family or to their life personally. Their responses on the evaluations were positive, and many asked when the next session would take place.

Parent Presentation

St. Francis of Assisi Newman Center and Parish
Muncie, Indiana

This section contains:

Pre-survey

Publicity Materials

Presentation Outline

Presentation Handouts for Parents

Presentation Evaluations

Pre-Survey
Survey Monkey
Template & Responses

slwinterrowd Sign Out

My Surveys Address Book My Account Plans & Pricing

+ Create Survey

You have a **BASIC** account | To remove the limits of a BASIC account and get unlimited questions, upgrade now!**St. Francis Parent Survey** Edit

Edit Survey

Preview Survey

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

Peach Sherbet Create Custom Theme

+ Add Page

PAGE 1

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1. St. Francis Family Survey

Hello! Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey!

My name is Stacey Winterrowd and I am a senior at Ball State studying child development. I live in the Newman Center at St. Francis as part of the Christian Leadership Program. As part of the Christian Leadership Program (CLP), I have the opportunity to complete an internship.

For my internship this spring, 2011, I want to serve you, the families at St. Francis! This survey is a way for me to gather information about your families and how I can serve you better!

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please contact me at slwinterrowd@bsu.edu or (317) 682 - 7986 or drop a note in my mailbox in the parish office!

+ Add Question ▼

+ Add Page

PAGE 2

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2.

+ Add Question ▼

Q1

Edit Question ▼

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1. Tell me about your family: How long has your family been members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish? How many children do you have and what are their ages?

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Q2 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

2. How many hours do you spend reading to your children per week?

- 0 - 1 hour
- 1 - 2 hours
- 2 - 3 hours
- 3 - 4 hours
- 5 hours +

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q3 Edit Question ▼ Move Copy Delete

3. How important is it for you to read to your children daily?

Unimportant Somewhat important Important Very Important

Please choose one.

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q4 Edit Question ▼ Move Copy Delete

4. Did your parents read to you growing up? If yes, please explain what the experience was like. What do you remember from the time you spent with your parents as they read to you?

+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q5 Edit Question ▼ Move Copy Delete

5. How do you share your faith with your children? How does your family share their faith? What traditions do you share? Do you use any resources, such as children's Bibles, books on saints, etc.?

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Q6 Edit Question ▼ Add Question Logic Move Copy Delete

6. Have your children been Baptized?

☐ Yes☐ No☐ Yes, but not all.[+ Add Question](#) ▼ [Split Page Here](#)Q7 [Edit Question](#) ▼ [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

7. How are you fulfilling the promises you made at your child's Baptism to raise him or her in the church? Remember the words that Father asked you: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

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8. What resources are you aware of that St. Francis has for you and your child to grow together, specifically, in the library? What resources are you aware of in the community? (ie. local libraries or book stores)

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9. Rate your interest in attending an hour long program about how to use Catholic children's literature to help teach your children about the faith? This program would be an opportunity to share personal successes and struggles in educating your children about the Catholic faith, as well as an opportunity for fellowship with other St. Francis families. (Baby sitting would be provided!)

☐ No interest☐ Somewhat interested☐ Interested☐ Very interested

Please choose one.

[+ Add Question](#) ▼ [Split Page Here](#)Q10 [Edit Question](#) ▼ [Add Question Logic](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

10. What would be a good day/time for you to attend this program?

☐ Weekday Evening☐ Weekend Morning

Weekend Evening
During FEP

+ Add Question ▼

+ Add Page

slwinterrowd Sign Out

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+ Create Survey

You have a **BASIC account** | To remove the limits of a BASIC account and get unlimited questions, upgrade now!**St. Francis Parent Survey**

Default Report + Add Report

Response SummaryTotal Started Survey: 11
Total Completed Survey: 11 (100%)

PAGE: 2

1. Tell me about your family: How long has your family been members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish? How many children do you have and what are their ages?

Download

Response
Count

Show Responses 11

answered question 11

skipped question 0

2. How many hours do you spend reading to your children per week?

Create Chart

Download

Response
Percent Response
Count

0 - 1 hour 9.1% 1

1 - 2 hours 27.3% 3

2 - 3 hours 9.1% 1

3 - 4 hours 36.4% 4

5 hours + 18.2% 2

answered question 11

skipped question 0

3. How important is it for you to read to your children daily?

Create Chart

Download

Unimportant Somewhat
important Important Very
Important Rating
Average Response
Count

Please choose one. 9.1% (1) 0.0% (0) 9.1% (1) 81.8% (9) 3.64 11

answered question 11

skipped question 0

4. Did your parents read to you growing up? If yes, please explain what the experience was like.
What do you remember from the time you spent with your parents as they read to you?

[Download](#)

	Response Count
Show Responses	11
answered question	11
skipped question	0

5. How do you share your faith with your children? How does your family share their faith? What traditions do you share? Do you use any resources, such as children's Bibles, books on saints, etc.?

[Download](#)

	Response Count
Show Responses	11
answered question	11
skipped question	0

6. Have your children been Baptized?

[Create Chart](#)

[Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	11
No	0.0%	0
Yes, but not all.	0.0%	0
answered question		11
skipped question		0

7. How are you fulfilling the promises you made at your child's Baptism to raise him or her in the church? Remember the words that Father asked you: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

[Download](#)

	Response Count
Show Responses	9
answered question	9
skipped question	2

8. What resources are you aware of that St. Francis has for you and your child to grow together, specifically, in the library? What resources are you aware of in the community? (ie. local libraries or book stores) [Download](#)

	Response Count
Show Responses	10
answered question	10
skipped question	1

9. Rate your interest in attending an hour long program about how to use Catholic children's literature to help teach your children about the faith? This program would be an opportunity to share personal successes and struggles in educating your children about the Catholic faith, as well as an opportunity for fellowship with other St. Francis families. (Baby sitting would be provided!) [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

	No interest	Somewhat interested	Interested	Very interested	Rating Average	Response Count
Please choose one.	27.3% (3)	18.2% (2)	27.3% (3)	27.3% (3)	2.55	11
						answered question 11
						skipped question 0

10. What would be a good day/time for you to attend this program? [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Weekday Evening	37.5%	3
Weekend Morning	62.5%	5
Weekend Evening	25.0%	2
During FEP	75.0%	6
		answered question 8
		skipped question 3

1. Tell me about your family: How long has your family been members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish? How many children do you have and what are their ages?

We have been members for about 13 years. Two children: 6 and 4.

12/13/10 10:24AM

We have been members of St. Francis for 3 years. We have an almost 7 year old and a 3 1/2 year old.

12/14/10 2:07AM

We have been members at St. Francis for a little over 7 years. We have one child, age 3 (almost 4).

12/17/10 5:54AM

We have been members for approx. 18yrs. We have twins, age 14yrs.

12/20/10 12:43AM

We've been here fifteen out of the past twenty years. Two kids -- a five year old and a newborn.

12/30/10 11:14PM

We've been at St. Francis for six years. We have two sons, ages 1 and 4.

12/31/10 1:24AM

Members for 5 years. Children ages 0 and 3.

12/31/10 1:40AM

I grew up at St. Francis. I have been a member there for almost 30 years. My husband and I now bring our two children. They are 3.5 years old and 6 months old.

12/31/10 11:07AM

4 years - members 5.5, 3.5, 1.5, 4mo

1/9/11 2:25PM

We have been members for about 10 years, maybe more. We have a daughter age 6 and a son age 2.

1/10/11 3:03AM

4 children 9,8,6, and 15mo. We have been going to st. Francis for about 4 years

1/13/11 12:39AM

4. Did your parents read to you growing up? If yes, please explain what the experience was like. What do you remember from the time you spent with your parents as they read to you?

Yes, they were both very animated and reading was important in our home. We are all readers now as adults.

12/13/10 10:24AM

Yes! Reading was an important way for us to bond. I can remember the blizzard of 1977. My Mom, brother, and I read together under a blanket in a big green chair we had in the family room. I still have the book series we read to one day share with my children when they are old enough.

12/14/10 2:07AM

My parents read to us often. I remember sitting with my mom and reading my favorite books. It was a special sort of quiet time that we shared.

12/17/10 5:54AM

Don't remember being read to. My children now are teenagers, but we read to them for hours every day when they were little.

12/20/10 12:43AM

My parents didn't read much to me, but they did encourage me to read on my own as I learned how.

12/30/10 11:14PM

Yes. I mostly remember bedtime stories, and my parents using very silly voices, sometimes parodizing the stories on the fly.

12/31/10 1:24AM

Yes My mother read lots of books with us very frequently. She was a stay-at-home mom, which helped. My father read his monster comics with my brother and I, which were very influential in my love of sci fi, fantasy, and comics.

12/31/10 1:40AM

yes. I loved being read to. I have happy memories of being read to.

12/31/10 11:07AM

yes - loved cuddling up to them and asking them questions with regards to the stories

1/9/11 2:25PM

Yes, I know they read to me but my memories are limited as to details.

1/10/11 3:03AM

yes!! I remeber reading all the time with my mom!

1/13/11 12:39AM

5. How do you share your faith with your children? How does your family share their faith? What traditions do you share? Do you use any resources, such as children's Bibles, books on saints, etc.?

Daily dialogue. We pray together, we learn together, we build everything from the foundation of our faith. We use books, prayers, etc often.

12/13/10 10:24AM

We utilize the resources obtained in FEP as discussion items during dinner and bed times. I find those family resources to be helpful. We also pray together as a family every night before bedtime.

12/14/10 2:07AM

We pray together at meals and we also do impromptu prayer at bedtime along with some standard prayers. I like to read Children's Bible stories, but they don't always seem as effective as I would like for them to be.

12/17/10 5:54AM

We discuss the sermons on the way home from church each week. We attend mass every week, along w/special services and events. We pray together every night. We pray the rosary during Lent.

12/20/10 12:43AM

My immediate family was not religious and did not practice much religion. My grandmother played a much larger role in that direction.

12/30/10 11:14PM

We go to Mass as a family every week. We have never used the nursery. We talk about Jesus, read books, share grace, and celebrate Advent. The kids are still very young, so we'll probably try a family Lenten activity for the first time this year. We have some flap books about Jesus' life, and some Usborne children's bible stories. One of those books is on CD, and our oldest enjoys listening to that. I'm not all that familiar with resources for this age group, so what religious texts we have are things that I've either tried on my own, or that friends had. I have checked the parish library, but a lot of their children's books are not religious at all. It's hard to really look around when the kids are in tow, however.

12/31/10 1:24AM

We pray before meals, though that's pretty light. We have some Christian childrens' books. I try to get the 3yo to tell me about what happens in childrens' liturgy, but that is challenging for him to explain. We have some religious family traditions such as advent candles.

12/31/10 1:40AM

We do share our faith with our children. Mostly by example, praying together, and talking. We also have a children's Bible and a few other Christian Children's books we read.

12/31/10 11:07AM

discussions, children's bibles, activities resources that we have bought, FEP given materials

1/9/11 2:25PM

We have many faith related books. We pray for meals, we talk about our faith. Our daughter is in her 3rd year of Catholic school, so we have many opportunities related to that as well.

1/10/11 3:03AM

We attend church and FEP. The children say a nightly and dinner prayer.

1/13/11 12:39AM

7. How are you fulfilling the promises you made at your child's Baptism to raise him or her in the church? Remember the words that Father asked you: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

* Weekly mass and mass on holy days * Praying as a family * Leading by example

12/14/10 2:07AM

We attend church regularly and I try to go to daily mass as often as possible and take our child when I can. We are also becoming more active in the church so that our child can have an example of how we are trying to carry out our faith. Our child attends FEP weekly and we review the materials with him after each session.

12/17/10 5:54AM

Mass every Sunday, FEP, mealtime and bedtime prayers at home.

12/30/10 11:14PM

We attend Mass as a family, and we're trying to raise them to love God and their neighbors. At this age, everything is about sharing and being nice to others, so I feel like loving our neighbor is getting a lot of attention. "God" is still kind of an abstract concept for me, so I find that more difficult to teach. Also, the

story of Jesus involves some pretty adult themes, not the least of which is death and resurrection, tricky subjects for little kids. We say grace as a family and need to resume bedtime prayers.

12/31/10 1:24AM

We bring the kids to mass every week and on holy days. My wife and I volunteer and are active in various ministries, and I hope that this shows the children that we are serious about our commitment to the church.

12/31/10 1:40AM

We bring our children to church every week and on Holy Days. They know it is important to us. We pray as a family several times per day and answer questions as questions of faith come up.

12/31/10 11:07AM

I think we are doing a good job, but there is always room to improve and learn new things.

1/9/11 2:25PM

We attend Mass weekly, share our Faith at home, raise our children as best we can to love God and our neighbors. St. Lawrence Elementary school has also been a blessing to us. During our daughter's first year of preschool, we were blown away by her knowledge of the faith that we were not sure she was ready to try to understand. We understand it is ultimately our duty to raise our children in the faith, but it is nice when they receive instruction in a variety of settings, including school.

1/10/11 3:03AM

we try and raise our children under gods words. We include god everyday life.

1/13/11 12:39AM

8. What resources are you aware of that St. Francis has for you and your child to grow together, specifically, in the library? What resources are you aware of in the community? (ie. local libraries or book stores)

I am aware of the Madonna Shoppe in Muncie. I have not checked out the library at St. Francis yet.

12/14/10 2:07AM

I haven't checked out anything in the church library. I do try to look for a couple of books each week at the library that are more religious based...not always Catholic faith.

12/17/10 5:54AM

Think this program is probably geared toward families w/younger children than mine. But thank you for taking an interest in the families of St. Francis!

12/20/10 12:43AM

I know they are there, but we use resources that were given to us as gifts or purchased at stores.

12/30/10 11:14PM

Very few, but I'd like to look at the library more closely, for myself and the kids.

12/31/10 1:24AM

I know the library is there, and that my wife has taken some books from it. For the community, I am not aware of anything beyond volunteer opportunities (soup kitchens, etc).

12/31/10 1:40AM

I know of the library, but I have not visited or borrowed any materials. I never considered it a resource for our children.

12/31/10 11:07AM

never really been in the library at SFA, not aware of materials that can be borrowed

1/9/11 2:25PM

We have not really used the library at St. Francis. We do get items from local stores that sell faith-related items. There are also catalog and online resources that we have used to purchase books.

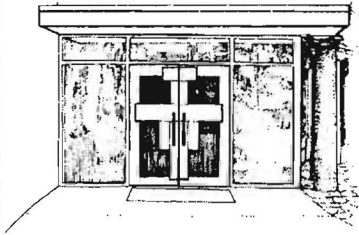
1/10/11 3:03AM

videos and books are always helpful

1/13/11 12:39AM

Publicity Materials
St. Francis of Assisi Bulletin Announcement
Flyer

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI PARISH



**Newman Center for Catholic Students
at Ball State University**
1200 W. Riverside Ave., Muncie, Indiana 47303
Office: 288-6180, 288-6149 (Voice/TDD)
Fax: (765) 288-7777
Email: admin.stfrancis@comcast.net
www.stfrancisnewman.org



Parish Ministry

Fr. Christopher Weldon
Mindy Bowman
Jamie Johnson
Mike Haigerty
Ellen Brinkman
Renee Hood
Shirley Shaw
Nick Barratt
Jill Pitcher
Pete Dall

Pastor
Campus Minister
Music Director/Liturgy Coordinator
Director of Religious Formation
Finance/Development/Facilities
Staff Assistant
Sacramental Records
Catholic Student Union President
FOCUS Team Director
Parish Council President

Mass Schedule

WEEKEND SCHEDULE:

Saturday	5:30 pm	
Sunday	9:00 am	Nursery Available
	11:15 am	Nursery Available
	8:00 pm	(During school year)

WEEKDAY SCHEDULE:

Mon. Wed. Fri.	5:15 pm
Tues. Thurs.	12:15 pm
Saturday	9:00 am

Reconciliation

Saturday	After 9:00 am Mass
	5:00 pm
Sunday	After 8:00 pm Mass
Anytime by appointment	

Office Hours

Mon.-Fri. 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Closed Holidays

New Parishioners

Registration forms are located in the parish office. If you are moving from the parish or have a change of address, please call the office so that we may update our records.

RCIA & Inquiry into the Catholic Faith

Contact Doris Rhea (284-2413) or call Mike Haigerty at the office to learn more about the Roman Catholic Church.

Sacrament of Baptism

Infant baptisms for registered parishioners: Both parents are to attend two classes that are held on the 1st Wednesday of the month in February, May, August and November at 7:00 pm in the Costello Room.

Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation must begin at least six months prior to the anticipated date of marriage. Call the office to arrange a time with a priest for your initial meeting. Students: Marriage preparation may begin here even though the marriage may be held elsewhere.

Ministry to Sick & Shut-Ins

Notify the office if you are going into the hospital or if you would like the Sacrament of the Sick, Communion or visitation at home.

Bulletin Deadline

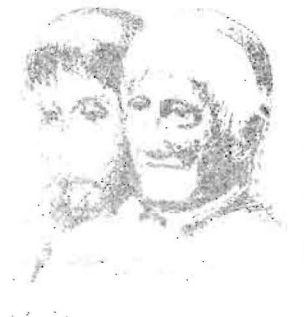
Monday 1:00 pm

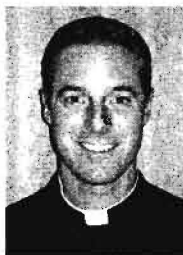
*Double bulletin schedule during the summer
Holiday schedules may differ*

MISSION STATEMENT

*The Mission of the Catholic people of Northcentral Indiana is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, praise the name of Jesus and follow Him by: **loving** God and our neighbor, especially those in need; **worshipping** God as a faith community in word and sacrament; **responding** to ongoing personal conversion; **teaching** of the Gospel message in the Catholic tradition; and **engaging** in renewal, outreach, evangelization and ecumenical cooperation. We, the people of the Local Church, gathered by the power of the Holy Spirit, are committed to responsible stewardship of our human and financial resources.*

*As a part of the Local Church of Northcentral Indiana, we the people of St. Francis of Assisi Parish are called to fulfill this mission as a University Parish and Newman Center. We serve as the Catholic Community of Ball State University by: **reaching out** to Ball State University students, faculty and professional staff; providing a nurturing environment in which all are welcome; and **encouraging and challenging** each other to grow in faith and knowledge.*





Pax et Bonum

It seems the news out of New York last month wasn't so great. No doubt some of you know the words to the song, "New York" by Frank Sinatra.

"I'm gonna make a brand new start of it
in old New York

And if I can make it there, I'm gonna make it anywhere."

While reading *The Catholic Moment*, I was reminded that not everyone can make a "brand new start of it". They can't make a start of it at all, for that matter. Nor can they make it anywhere, because they can't make it there. Why not? Because the New York City Department of Health recently reported that 87,273 abortions were performed in the five boroughs in 2009. That accounts for **41% of all pregnancies** in New York City. That number was higher in the Bronx (home of Yankees) at 48%. Folks, that is **2 percentage points short of 50%**! That means that nearly **half** of the women who get pregnant in the Bronx abort their babies.... What is happening?

"Ole Blue Eyes" sang, "These little town blues are melting away." Maybe. But they're giving way to big town blues. Being a native of New York, I can't tell you how saddened I am. The only good news is that abortions were down from the 1999 high of 94,466 (cbsnews.com). It could be that the Pro-Life Movement is making a difference. And, in fact, there is little doubt.

Though it may be difficult, almost impossible, to find any reports on it in the major press and media outlets, there were over 300,000 men and women, young and old, who attended the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. This was not a rare occasion. These peaceful marches have been occurring for decades (38 years) - and they continue to grow in size. It seems strange, no, unjust, that every year around 300,000 people prayerfully march through D.C. and it receives no media coverage. Can you imagine if another group marched with even 100,000? We'd hear about it for days.

Alas, it is what is, as are the stats coming out of New York. My brothers and sisters, whether it be abortion or euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research or physician assisted suicide, whether it be the unethical use of capital punishment or racism, rape or people trafficking, we must pray and work for a more just society. I am so encouraged by so many of our students and resident parishioners who are doing just that. Whether supporting First Choice for Women here in Muncie, or supplying for what corruption depletes in Haiti, we are making a difference. And we must continue to do so without tiring.

Let us pray for a change of heart for so many in the Bronx and throughout New York. Let us pray that human life will be respected in all its forms, everywhere and at all times.

In Christ
Fr. Weldon

The Catholic Student Union Council's Annual Spring Gala

Come and 'Swing the Night Away' at the Parish Gala on Saturday, February 19th! Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and dinner will be served at 7:00 p.m. Slap on your dancing shoes, flapper girl dresses and snappy tuxes as we travel back to the Golden Age of Big Band and Swing! Tickets will be available for sale after Mass on this weekend. The cost is only \$8 for single, \$15 for student couple and \$20 for resident couple. Tickets will **NOT** be sold at the door.

Semi-Formal Attire Requested.



St. Francis Parents

All St. Francis parents are invited to attend an informational session on Sunday, February 20th during FEP (10:00-11:00 a.m.) in the Newman House. As part of my CLP (Christian Leadership Program) internship, I have spent time reading *Familiaris Consortio*, an apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II. Come learn about "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World" and resources available to parents in the local community, right here at St. Francis, and online. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Stacey Winterrowd at slwinterrowd@bsu.edu or call 317-682-7986.



F.E.P. Date Reminder

We will not have FEP this Sunday, February 13th due to Men's CRHP weekend. We are meeting on Sunday, February 20th. Again, no FEP on February 27th due to Women's CRHP weekend. No FEP on Sunday, March 6th due to BSU Spring Break. We are meeting on Sunday, March 13th but not on Sunday, March 20th due to Muncie Schools Spring Break. We are meeting on Sunday, March 27th. We will finish the year with sessions on Sunday April 3rd and 10th. Questions? Call Mike at 765-288-6180 or admin.stfrancis@comcast.net.

High School Girls Retreat

Attention all Teen girls ages 13 to 17. St. Francis Parish is offering a **girl** only Sacred Sexuality retreat, *Meeting God in Myself*, at John XXIII Retreat Center on May 13th thru 15th. A team of 9 women will present topics that center around the sacredness of a woman's sexuality and her connection to the world and God. Self-esteem, love, communication skills, sex and God are woven together to guide each girl into discovering the real person who lives in her body. If you have ever wondered if you are good enough, smart enough, popular enough, or loved enough then this retreat is for YOU! The cost is \$93 per girl which covers all meals and sleeping arrangements (towels and linens are supplied, t-shirts and other gifts). Parents, you will be giving your daughter an amazing gift by sending her on this retreat. Registration forms are available at the Parish Office. Early registration is encouraged as there are only 18 spots available. Please return completed registrations with deposit of \$45 to hold your spot to Mike Haigerty. Deadline for registration is February 20th. Scholarships are available. For more information or sign up, please call Mike Haigerty, 288-6180 or Pat Brandstatter, 574-753-5460.

St. Francis Parents are invited
to an informational session on

“The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World”

Sunday: February 20, 2011

During F.E.P. (10:00am-11:00am)

St. Francis Newman Center

2nd Floor Meeting Room

Presentation by Stacey Winterrowd

Ball State Student and member of the Christian Leadership Program

Come learn about what Pope John Paul II has to say about
your important role as a parent!

Also, learn about resources available in the community to
support your family's faith formation!

"The mission to educate demands that Christian parents should present to their children all topics that are necessary for the gradual maturing of their personality from a Christian and ecclesial point of view...taking care to show their children the depths of significance to which the faith and love of Jesus Christ can lead"

- Excerpt from *Familiaris Consortio*

One cannot underestimate this contemporary summary of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family. Clearly among the most important documents on the subject to be issued in this pontificate, *Familiaris Consortio* ought to become a central component in any marriage program or family spirituality. – Catholic Exchange

Attention St. Francis Parents

Sunday, February 20, 2011

TODAY

During F.E.P.

Bring your coffee and donuts and join us on the **second floor of the Newman Center** for a presentation and discussion about the **struggles and joys of raising your children in the Catholic Church**. Come learn about your important role and what resources are available to assist you along the way!

Presentation by Stacey Winterrowd, Ball State Senior, Child Development Major, Christian Leadership Program Internship and Senior Thesis



Online Resources

Resources at your fingertips!

catholicparents.org

catholicparenting.com

catholicfamilycatalog.com

catholicscomehome.org

catholic.com

fathersforgood.org

familyrosary.com

catholicfamilyfaith.com

catholicexchange.com

catholiccuisine.blogspot.com

usccb.org

newadvent.org



More Resources

Local Catholic Book Stores:

Madonna Shoppe

310 South Hackley Street,
Muncie, IN (765) 282-5070

Notre Dame Book Shelf

1219 Fletcher Street,
Anderson, IN (765) 642-9774

Holy Family Books & Gifts

1352 South Rangeline Road,
Carmel, IN (317) 705-2468

Village Dove

6935 Lake Plaza Dr # B3,
Indianapolis, IN (317) 845-
5487

Call for hours of operation and
directions.



Created By Stacey Winterowd
St. Francis Newman Center
Christian Leadership Program
Ball State University
Spring 2001 I

The Catholic Family:



The Domestic Church



St. Francis of Assisi
Newman Center &
Parish, Muncie, IN

The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World

The Second Vatican Council affirms the important role that parents have regarding the education and upbringing of their children.

"Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs." – Second Vatican Council

As parents, it is easy to feel as if you have failed or fallen short in fulfilling your obligation to raise your children in the practice of the faith. Parenting in general does not come with a manual or instructions, similarly, while the Catholic Church champions the important role of families, the Church does not provide a surefire method of raising faithful children. Do not become discouraged! Do not feel as if you have failed your family or your children. Do not think to yourself, "Yes, this sounds great but my kids are already older" or "It's too late." Just like it's never

St. Francis, Patron Saint of Families,
Pray for us!



too late to begin to grow in a deeper personal relationship with God, it is never too late to begin to incorporate your faith into your daily life. It's never too late to make changes. You can begin to implement small changes in your daily routine, such as saying grace before meals or prayers before bedtime. As your family begins to feel comfortable with these new additions, you can slowly add more, such as a decade of the rosary or attending daily Mass once a week. Even if life gets crazy and you forget to pray one night, do not become discouraged! Pick right back up where you left off.

Utilize your resources. At St. Francis you have countless resources available in the staff, fellow parents, and the sacraments. Use the Internet; it is a powerful tool when used properly. There is endless information online for ways to incorporate your faith into your daily life. Finally and most

importantly, pray for your children and for your family. Trust that God will guide and protect you through all of life's ups and downs.

About Me:

My name is Stacey Winterrowd. I am a senior at Ball State University studying Child Development. I will graduate this spring, May 2011. I am originally from Indianapolis. I have a passion for working with children and have had the opportunity to work in a variety in childcare settings. Through my experiences, my course work, and my studies, one thing has become very clear – families are incredibly influential in shaping the lives of children.

This semester, I have taken time to research the Catholic Church's view on families. Does the Church think families and parents are important? Does the Church value the work parents do in educating and raising their children in their Catholic faith? Are there resources available for parents who are seeking to pass on their faith? Do all parents struggle with how to share their faith and live it out every day?

The answer to all of these questions is a resounding YES!

If you were unable to attend my brief presentation and would like more information, contact me at (317) 682-7986 or slwinterrowd@bsu.edu.

Presentation Outline

Stacey Winterrowd

Presentation Outline

February 20, 2011

Opening Prayer: Romans 12: 9-17

I. Introductions

a. Speaker/Presenter/Facilitator – Stacey

i. Personal information – who am I?

1. Hometown – Indianapolis
2. Family – 2 brothers, cradle Catholic, only practicing member of my family
3. Senior at Ball State studying child development
4. member of the Christian leadership program (CLP) – this is my internship/senior thesis

ii. Background info – how this presentation came to be

1. why I wanted to do this...love children, love my Catholic faith, want to help parents, universal call to holiness
2. course work emphasized the important role of the family and parent involvement – I decided to see what the church says on this
3. project has evolved and changed based on the information I discovered – the Church has a lot to say about the role of parents and the family

iii. Introductions of audience

1. Name, tell us a little about your family
2. How long have you been at St. Francis

II. Overview of Presentation

a. Introduce Main Points

- i. First we will discuss why are we here
- ii. We will discuss the who, what, when, where, why, how

1. The majority of the information presented today will be from APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO* OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE CLERGY AND TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE WHOLE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD

iii. Finally, we will conclude with time for reflection and discussion

III. Why are we here?

1. Universal call to holiness – The universal call to holiness in the Roman Catholic Church is rooted in baptism, a sacrament which configures a person to Jesus Christ who is God and man, thus uniting a person with the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, bringing him in communion with intra-trinitarian life.
John Paul II states in his apostolic Letter his master plan for the new millennium, a "program for all times", that holiness is not only a state but a task, whereby Christians should strive for a full Christian life, imitating Christ, the Son of God, who gave his life for God and for his neighbor. This entails a "training in the art of prayer". According to the Pope, all pastoral initiatives have to be set in relation to holiness, as this has to be the topmost priority of the Church. The universal call to holiness is explained as more fundamental than the vocational discernment to particular ways of life such as priesthood, marriage, or virginity.
2. The second Vatican council states "since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves (pass on) on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development

will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs”

IV. Presentation – meat of the presentation

a. Who

i. *The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity – Familiaris Consortio*

1. Parents

2. Children

3. Husbands and wives

a. JP II talks about the reinstating marriage and upholding it in our modern culture; there are many troubling circumstances

b. *Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. Familiaris Consortio*

c. *By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church. Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers. - Familiaris Consortio*

b. What - John Paul II has always been a great champion of Catholic family life. He began the article by sharing a conversation with a friend. His friend said he wished that the Catholic Church would write something like “7 habits of highly effective families” which is written by a Mormon author. Dr. Thomas shares that JP II has written some great things about the family. Information from an article by Dr. David Thomas who *received his doctorate in historical and systematic theology from the University of Notre Dame. He is a former professor of religion and family life at Regis University in Denver, Colorado. He is currently a family life and theological consultant to Benziger Publishing Company and is codirector of the Bethany Family Institute. He has been married to Karen for 36 years. They*

have seven children and have foster-parented over 70 children. Here are seven of his classic truths about the family:

americancatholic.org

i. A Foundation for Life

1. especially in the early years, parents symbolize God for their children – parents make God real to the child
2. the early years are important and their effect is lasting – parents have a major role in developing the human and spiritual life of their children
 - a. JP II says this role is “irreplaceable”
3. experts in child development agree (and so do I!)

ii. Persons Equal in Dignity

1. family love is so important *“the family has as its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love..” JP II*
2. JP II affirms the dignity of every human person – everyone is created by God to love and be loved – the full dignity of each person begins in the family (and if it fails to happen there, it probably will not happen elsewhere)
3. Family is the foundation of Christian life
 - a. 2 key relationships that affirm the basic equality and dignity between persons
 - i. love between husband and wife – this love should be an expression of full self-giving
 1. JP II emphasizes the importance of full and mutual love between spouses
 - ii. parent child relationship
 1. parents are charged with communicating the tender love of God to their children and hopefully this message will remain with them forever

2. International Year of the Family (1994)
Pope John Paul II wrote: "The family is indeed more than any other social reality, the place where an individual can exist 'for himself' through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution that neither can nor should be replaced: it is the 'sanctuary of life'"

iii. The Domestic Church

1. Second Vatican Council declared the family the "Domestic Church"
2. JPII speaks of the family as the "Church in miniature"
3. the family is in its own way a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the church
4. strong affirmation of the family's identity
 - a. Pope Paul VI taught that the family possesses all the essential feature of the Church
5. The home is a Church, it may be messy, unstructured, noisy, and disorganized, but its still a church
6. thinking about the family as the domestic church is a whole new way of thinking about and experiencing family life – everything that happens in family life is important too

iv. Parents Minister to their Children

1. *"By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are through the witness of their lives the first heralds of the gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them...into the Body of Christ—both the eucharistic and the ecclesial body—they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life, but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the cross and resurrection of Christ" Familiaris Consortio*

2. child development experts know that what is communicated in the family often sticks with a person throughout life, new connections in the brain, once established are rarely, if ever altered, they can be build on or added to but they cannot be totally erased
3. parents must understand their important role as “family evangelizers”
4. the most important catechetical experience occurs in the home – the home is where basic Christian ministry happens, where the word of God is first and continually proclaimed and where one can recognize and experience God’s love

v. Nursery of Society and the Church

1. *the future of the world and the Church passes through the family-Familiaris Consortio*
2. the family is the entrance point in personal history – society and the Church are tied to the lives of real people
3. Reflect on these words in his great social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*: “It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: It is the place in which life—the gift of God—can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life” (*Centesimus Annus*, #39).
4. the family is instrumental in forming the future, in the family we learn the basic skills of relating to one another; children learn hospitality and ways to deal with life’s challenges; they learn respect for self and respect for others; they learn the value of people within and outside their family; they develop ways of dealing with differences
5. the future begins in the family

vi. Spirituality of the Ordinary

1. JPII says prayer involves: *"Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, birth and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those that are near, etc.—all of these mark God's loving intervention in the family's history"* *Familiaris Consortio*
2. family spirituality is fully relational, the love of God is mixed with love of neighbor
3. family prayer is often said on the run
4. parents crave moments of silence, but constant noise may be the norm; moments of interpersonal life often outnumber moments of solitude and that's OK
5. parents are not religious sisters or brothers; parents spirituality flows from what happens each day in the confusion of their home church – how encouraging

vii. Families Become What you Are

1. God has high expectations for the Christian family – its role is central in advancing God's reign on earth
2. In God's plan, the Christian family is a community of life and love; it is a living cell of people committed to each other; in their love for each other, there comes forth new life; this love reflects God's as it take on graced sacramental form in the very ordinary families
3. The family is a reflection of the Trinity – creating life out of love
4. Creating a Christian family, a family where mutual love and care find daily expression, may be one of the most difficult of all human tasks. With the writings of this pope, families can be comforted; their efforts are of central importance for the life of the Church and are building God's kingdom now and forever.

- c. When
 - i. Right now! It's never too late! Don't be discouraged, no matter where you are right now, it's never too late.
 - ii. Begin by deepening your own relationship with Jesus Christ
- d. Where
 - i. At home
 - ii. Here at St. Francis
 - iii. In your children's schools
 - iv. At work
- e. Why
 - i. Universal call to holiness, promises you made at Baptism, marriage vows
 - ii. *Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church. Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride. - Familiaris Consortio*
- f. How
 - i. Small simple changes
 - 1. Begin by seeking holiness in your own life
 - a. Spend time reading the gospels early in the morning
 - b. Deepening your own faith will set an example for your children
 - i. St. Francis quote "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words."
 - 1. Often it is necessary to preach but you set a huge example by the small things you do each day.
 - ii. Get up 5 minutes early to read the daily gospel, for example

2. grace, bedtime prayers, morning prayers, daily Gospel readings, decade of the rosary, daily Mass, going to Mass while on vacation
3. Pray with & FOR your children
 - a. Pray for their vocations
 - b. Fast for them/make sacrifices
4. Other ideas?

V. Review of Information

- a. Review main points
- b. Share information about websites from hand out
 - i. There are endless resources available to aid you and your family in the pursuit of holiness.
 - ii. Christian music is a wonderful way to fill your life with Christ's love.

VI. Discussion/Questions

- a. Questions for reflection/discussion
- b. How does this apply to your life?

VII. Closing

- a. Further information desired?
- b. Information about evaluations
- c. Closing Prayer – St. Francis, Pray for us!
 - i. Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Discussion Questions:

1. What ways are you helping to encourage the spirituality within your family? What are you doing for your domestic church?
2. How are you making time for your domestic church right now? What are ideas that you can share that you are doing?
3. What are some challenges that you have encountered and how are you working to overcome them?
4. How do you begin to make changes? Any advice?

Presentation Handouts for Parents

Helpful Resources for Parents

Maintain the Truth Lovingly and Always Love Truthfully. - Pope John Paul II

Resources available for parents are seemingly endless. This list is not complete but is meant to serve a starting point for future inquiry and discovery. Never forget the support, guidance, and wisdom you have right here in our own community among fellow parents, fellow Christians.

Online Resources:

<http://www.catholicparents.org/index.htm>
<http://www.catholicparenting.com/>
<http://www.osv.com/> - Our Sunday Visitor
<http://www.catholiccompany.com/>
<http://www.ignatius.com/>
<http://www.videoswithvalues.org/newhome.html>
<http://usccb.org/>
<http://www.catholicfamilycatalog.com/index.html>
<http://www.catholicscomehome.org/>
<http://www.catholic.com/>
<http://www.chastity.com/>
<http://ewtn.com/>
<http://www.fathersforgood.org/en/index.html>
<http://newadvent.org/>
<http://familyrosary.com/>
<http://www.catholicfamilyfaith.com/>
<http://catholicexchange.com>
<http://catholiccuisine.blogspot.com/>
<http://regnumchristi.com/english/>

Christian Music

<http://www.klove.com/>
www.pandora.com/christian
<http://www.air1.com/>

Local Catholic Book Stores:

Madonna Shoppe

310 South Hackley Street, Muncie, IN
(765) 282-5070

Notre Dame Book Shelf

1219 Fletcher Street, Anderson, IN
(765) 642-9774

Holy Family Books & Gifts

1352 South Rangeline Road, Carmel, IN
(317) 705-2468

Village Dove

6935 Lake Plaza Dr # B3, Indianapolis, IN
(317) 845-5487

Pope John Paul II's Advice for Families

By David Michael Thomas, Ph.D.

John Paul II has always been a great champion of Catholic family life. Here are seven of his classic truths about the family.

My friend and I were each eating a doughnut after Mass. He carried a book I recognized.

"How do you like that book?" I casually asked as we both took another bite.

"It's great: *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*, by that Covey fellow. I wish our Church would write something like this. You know, this fellow is a Mormon. We can learn a lot about family life from them. They think the family is really important."

"I know," I responded. "Our pope has written some great things about family, too." A brief silence ensued.

"Really?"

The Importance of Interpersonal Love

Yes, he really has. John Paul II often addresses issues directly connected with family life. Most of his important insights are found in his work entitled *Familiaris Consortio* (it translates into English as *On the Family*). It came out over 20 years ago as his apostolic response to the World Synod on the Family at the Vatican in 1980.

The pope's concern for family life is part of his overall understanding of the way we as persons, as images of God, develop through life. In his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, he shares the importance of interpersonal love in human life: "It is this vocation to love that naturally allows us to draw close to the young. As a priest I realized this very early. I felt almost an inner call in this direction. It is necessary to prepare young people for marriage; it is necessary *to teach them to love....As a young priest I learned to love human love*. This has been one of the fundamental themes of my priesthood my ministry in the pulpit, in the confessional, and also in my writings.

Seven Rich Ideas

I've studied the Church's view of marriage and family life for as long as I've been married now almost 37 years. I've taught at three Jesuit-founded universities and at St. Meinrad School of Theology, a seminary in Indiana founded by the Benedictines. But I almost always seem to be teaching this subject at the introductory level. As a Church we have often failed to communicate the rich teachings of our faith concerning marriage and family life.

Many Catholics have a general idea of what our faith is *against* in the area of marriage and family, but few seem to know what we're *for*. Hopefully, this summary of seven key areas of the pope's teachings will help Catholics and others appreciate more fully the challenging teachings of Pope John Paul II about the family.

A Foundation for Life

Especially during the early years of life, parents symbolize God for their children. In his teaching on the value of human life, the pope writes, "Within the 'people of life and the people for life,' *the family has a decisive responsibility*....Here it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and as it were interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan" (*Evangelium Vitae*, #92). Parents make God *real* to the child.

The pope is quite sensitive about what happens in human life from conception onward. He knows that the early years of life are important and their effect is lasting. Parents have a major role in developing the human and spiritual life of their children. They are so important that the pope judges their role "irreplaceable."

He addresses them as the "first evangelizers" of their children. Of course, they evangelize not so much by reading to an infant from St. Luke's Gospel. Rather, it is by embodying gospel love in all their daily words and actions.

What an important message for our age when some children feel alone, their parents busy with other matters. What can be more important than being present to and loving one's own children? Experts in child development agree on this. So does the pope.

Persons Equal in Dignity

In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II highlights the singular importance of family love. "Looking at [the family] in such a way as to reach its very roots, we must say that the essence and the role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the family has as its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love..." (*Familiaris Consortio*, #17).

John Paul never tires of affirming the dignity of every human person. Everyone is created by God to love and be loved. This truth grounds everything he communicates about justice and peace, the role of government, the treatment of everyone in the Church and all social issues that confront the world today. When it comes to family life, the same message applies. In fact, the full dignity of each person begins in the family, and if it fails to happen there, it probably will not happen elsewhere.

The family is foundational for Christian life. There are two key relationships that affirm basic equality and dignity between persons. First, there is the love between the husband and wife. Their love is to be an expression of full self-giving. In the pope's mind there is no room for one using the other as an object or thing.

Marriage is fully an interpersonal relationship. He underscores the importance of full and mutual love between the spouses. This is a main building block for his opposition to artificial contraception, which is less than a full expression of love and life.

His other area of concern is the relationship between parent and child. Again, full dignity and mutuality mark this relationship. Recent strong statements about child abuse under any circumstance demonstrate his concern.

Clearly, the pope has a warm spot in his heart for children. His desire to embrace children is well-known and respected. What a great symbol it is to have the pope, the leader of the Catholic Church, stop before a child, look into that child's eyes and communicate his love for that child! We are reminded of Jesus doing the same.

It is parents who are charged with communicating this tender love of God to their children. Hopefully, this message will remain with them forever. During the International Year of the Family (1994) Pope John Paul II wrote: "The family is indeed more than any other social reality, the place where an individual can exist 'for himself' through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution that neither can nor should be replaced: it is the 'sanctuary of life'" (*Letter to Families*, #11). Family is that community of persons oriented to the full development of personhood in each member. It does this through love.

The Domestic Church

The Second Vatican Council brought forward from the writings of the Church Fathers the description of the family as "the domestic Church." In *Familiaris Consortio* the pope speaks of the family "as a 'Church in miniature' (*ecclesia domestica*) in such a way that in its own way is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #49).

This is a strong affirmation of the family's identity. He is saying that the family itself is a Church according to its own way of life. Pope Paul VI, in his writings on evangelization, taught that the family

possesses all the essential features of the Church. Therefore, it is somewhat inaccurate for families to say that they go to church, because they are already Church at home. It may be messy, terribly unstructured, noisy and disorganized, but it's still Church.

Pope John Paul II has used this title for the family hundreds of times both in his writings and in public addresses. I was in Washington, D.C., when the pope first came to America. He said to the thousands assembled on the Mall that the family is a Church, a domestic Church. I cheered. The implications of this teaching are momentous. It's a whole new way of thinking about and experiencing family life. As Catholics, we were always taught that what happened in church is exceedingly important. Now we can include everything good that takes place in family life as the grist of what makes us saints.

My wife and I recently painted the interior walls of our home, a task that can be a genuine burden. But in the course of my brush strokes, I suddenly thought of this seemingly mundane action as roughly equivalent to Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel. My feelings immediately changed. I felt quite proud of my monochrome mural on the wall of the living room. I was decorating our family cathedral. Consciousness makes a big difference, and the pope has the philosophical training to know this. That's why he repeats over and over that the Christian family is the domestic Church.

The pope further describes the role of the family in the Church. "Christian marriage and family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of rebirth in baptism and education in the faith is also introduced to God's family, which is the Church" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #15).

Parents Minister to Their Children

The pope greatly respects the role of Christian parents in the life of the Church. He challenges them: "By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are through the witness of their lives the first heralds of the gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them...into the Body of Christ both the eucharistic and the ecclesial body they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life, but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the cross and resurrection of Christ" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #39).

Here again the pope extends important ecclesial language to include the life of the family. Parents are the "first heralds" of the gospel to their children. Too often we think of evangelization as something done by adults for adults. We think about the RCIA program or hospitality events of the Catholic parish. These are important ways to bring outsiders into the warm embrace of God through the life of the Church. But that kind of evangelization is designed to bring people *into* the Church. What about those already baptized who live in Christian families? How do we best keep them in? Here is where the ecclesial life of the family is so important. Child development experts know that what is communicated in the family often sticks with a person throughout life. First impressions can be lasting ones. New connections in the brain, once established, are rarely, if ever, altered. They can be built upon, or added to, but they cannot be totally erased.

One great challenge of our times is alerting Christian parents to the importance of their role as "family evangelizers." Ask any catechist where the most important catechetical experience of the child occurs and before you've finished asking the question, they will reply, "in the home." The home is where basic Christian ministry happens, where the Word of God is first and continually proclaimed and where one can recognize and experience God's great love.

Nursery of Society and the Church

"The future of the world and the Church passes through the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #79). We find this principle enunciated time after time by Pope John Paul II. He is deeply aware of the flow of history. No one celebrated more fully the opportunities offered by the passage into the new millennium. He truly captured that moment. By establishing the family as the entrance point in personal history, he reminds us that society and the Church are tied to the lives of real people. This is especially emphasized when he defends the importance of life.

Reflect on these words in his great social encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*: "It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the *sanctuary of life*. The family is indeed sacred: It is the place in which life the gift of God can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life" (*Centesimus Annus*, #39).

History, for this pope, is not an abstraction. He experienced major events of history as World War II unfolded in his own neighborhood. He experienced the onslaught of Communism by seeing it transform the political life of his beloved Poland. He also witnessed the breakdown of Communism as one quite involved. While he has no children, no grandchildren and no immediate family to think about, he ponders the future with passion and deep concern.

He sees the life of the family as instrumental in forming the future. In the family, we learn the basic skills of relating to others. Children learn hospitality and ways to deal with life's challenges. They learn respect for self and respect for others. They learn the value of people within and outside their family. They develop ways of dealing with differences.

All these foundational human skills of relating to others are fashioned first within the family. In the family a sense of vocation and of discipleship is formulated. For the pope, the future begins in the family.

A Spirituality of the Ordinary

I have a favorite passage in *Familiaris Consortio* which I must share. Pope John Paul II is discussing family prayer. Prayer involves: "Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, birth and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those that are near, etc. all of these mark God's loving intervention in the family's history" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #59).

What a comprehensive list of what's constantly happening in families! I particularly like the mention of "departures, separations and homecomings." So much of family life is exactly that family members coming and going and coming back again. The door of the family home could easily be a revolving door. Think of all those families where the parents thought they were sending grown children into the world to fend for themselves. But what to parents' wondering eyes should appear, but the "children" returning with all of their gear!

Yes, family spirituality is fully relational. The love of God is thoroughly mixed with love of neighbor into a rich spiritual stew. Family prayer is often said on the run. While all parents crave moments of silence, constant noise may often be the order of the day. Moments of interpersonal life often outnumber moments of solitude. And that's all O.K.

Dads and moms are not monks and nuns. Their spiritual vitality percolates from what happens each day in the confusion of their home church. In this place, the Spirit of God stirs the air and sanctifies the spaces between family members.

Families, Become What You Are

The pope begins his expanded presentation of the role of the Christian family in today's world by saying: "The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is....Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and that specifies both its dignity and responsibility: family, become what you are" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #17).

Part of the pope's vision is an understanding of all creation as it flows from the mind and heart of God. Pope John Paul II concludes that God has high expectations for the Christian family. Its role is central in advancing God's reign on earth.

This pope is a complex blend of realism and idealism. The tension between the two is not relaxed for a minute. In God's plan, the Christian family is a community of life and love. It is a living cell of people committed to each other. In their love for each other, there comes forth new life day after day. This love reflects God's as it takes on graced sacramental form in very ordinary families. It is a reflection of the Trinity - creating life out of love.

Creating a Christian family, a family where mutual love and care find daily expression, may be one of the most difficult of all human tasks. With the writings of this pope, families can be comforted; their efforts are of central importance for the life of the Church and are building God's kingdom now and forever.

David Michael Thomas, Ph.D., received his doctorate in historical and systematic theology from the University of Notre Dame. He is a former professor of religion and family life at Regis University in Denver, Colorado. He is currently a family life and theological consultant to Benziger Publishing Company and is codirector of the Bethany Family Institute. He has been married to Karen for 36 years. They have seven children and have foster-parented over 70 children.

The Catholic Family:



The Domestic
Church



St. Francis of Assisi
Newman Center &
Parish, Muncie, IN

Presentation Evaluations

The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World
Presentation and Discussion
Sunday, February 20, 2011

Evaluation Form

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?
2. How were those expectations met or not met?
3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?
4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?
5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

Parent Evaluations

Evaluation Form: Parent 1

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?

I came with the expectation of learning about John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio. I also hoped to meet other parents.

2. How were those expectations met or not met?

I learned about Dr. Thomas and seven of Pope John's classic truths about the family. I too was surprised to learn that this even existed. I enjoyed interacting with other parents and hearing about their struggles and accomplishments.

3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?

I really liked the list of resources that you gave us. Also that it is never too late to start a new routine. The simple things we do everyday really matter that help us feel closer to God.

4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?

I cannot think of anything specific at this time but I really liked having the opportunity to get together with other adults while my kids were in FEP.

5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

I think more may have attended if there would have been an announcement at the end of 9a Mass.

Evaluation Form: Parent 2

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?

I love God and I love my family. I love to learn more about my faith and I love to learn how to be a better parent. My expectations for this presentation were to hear about two of my favorite things! I hoped to learn new and different ways to incorporate Christ into my family life.

2. How were those expectations met or not met?

My expectations were met by:

- The presenter sharing different times and places to incorporate Christ.
- The presenter sharing websites and book lists.
- Hearing examples from the people attending.

3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?

It was reassuring to hear that we shouldn't have to sit down for a formal hour of teaching with our children... rather we can be creative in our daily activities to involve Christ and His teachings. I think this was a good reminder that I need to do this more often... and the importance of why we do this as parents.

4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?

- Suggestions on when it is appropriate to transition children from the nursery to celebrate the entire mass.
- Suggestions on what is appropriate and what is not appropriate for kids to do during Church. (Read books? Eat Cheerios? Play with toys?) Sounds kinda funny.... but it's something I've struggled with.
- Suggestions on how to teach young children about what's going on during mass.

5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

No more questions.

Evaluation Form: Parent 3

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?

I did not have any expectations. I was just looking for some faith based parenting resources and ideas.

2. How were those expectations met or not met?

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3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?

Your research on family and Catholicism stood out the most and made me want to read more on this subject. I also enjoyed hearing ways that other parents fit faith with family into a busy day.

4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?

Not sure at this time...will need to read more to determine my areas of interest.

5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

No questions. But, I would love an hour 1/2 family bible study maybe on the first Sunday of the month that took scripture and applied it to the areas which we struggle with the most as parents (discipline, listening, following directions, respect, loving other, etc.). Example: Take a scripture, discuss it as a family then come back and present it to the group. May include family or TEAM building games, field trips etc. I also would be interested in a kid friendly guide to follow along with mass. Maybe something with a clothespin or paper clip that that could slide down the laminated page as the mass progressed. I keep thinking I would create this, I just haven't made the time.

Evaluation Form: Parent 4

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?

I honestly didn't have any expectations only because I wasn't sure how the session was going to go (how the format of the session was going to go). I was hoping to be able to access yet another avenue to connect with God and still include my family.

2. How were those expectations met or not met?

Since I hadn't set any expectations, the session exceeded my expectations by a long shot!

3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?

The background information that you had provided was really good, laid out very nicely, and provided a lot of "food for thought". The follow up discussion reinforced your information and helped me learn some other ways that I can be more spiritually active with my son and also my husband.

4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?

I think I would like to learn how to speak to them about Catholicism in a language that is geared toward his age group. I want to make sure I'm not talking over his head, but also sharing with him what he needs to learn and be aware of in our faith.

5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

When will we have another session?

Evaluation Form: Parent 5

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?

I was eager to hear about more options available at our parish and in the community for experiential learning for our little ones, as well as other resources in the community.

2. How were those expectations met or not met?

I was provided with examples of how other parents are incorporating their faith in their daily lives as well as a list of resources.

3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?

It was interesting to hear how important it is that we are teaching our faith in our homes. It seems so obvious to me, but that was the way that I was raised.

4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?

I don't know at this point. I am sure more questions will arise as my little ones mature. :)

5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

none at this time.

maybe provide babysitting for those who do not have child care readily available :)

Evaluation Form: Parent 6

1. What were your expectations for this presentation? What did you hope to learn from this experience?

I had few expectations. From what I understood, the presentation would be given on the topic of having and keeping a Catholic home and how to help build your children's' faiths. I was hoping to hear ways to talk to my kids regarding religious ideas and doctrine, etc. Also, to hear about resources and opportunities available to parents.

2. How were those expectations met or not met?

My expectations were met. I heard lots of great ideas and received great materials to look back at after the workshop.

3. What stood out to you the most? What do you think you will take with you?

The list of resources was very valuable to me. I appreciated that most. Also, to listen to the discussion and hear other parents speak on their experiences was awesome.

4. What would you like to learn more about regarding the topic of parenting and Catholicism?

I would love a operators manual!!! Ha!! On when to introduce what at what ages and how! It would just be helpful to have some sort of outline that described what they can understand and should know at what ages.

5. What questions do you still have? What suggestions do you have?

Aside from my answer to number 4, I have no other questions or suggestions!